

# BEFORE BRECHT: FOUR GERMAN PLAYS



THE UNDERPANTS  
by Carl Sternheim

LEONCE AND LENA  
by Georg Büchner

LA RONDE  
by Arthur Schnitzler

SPRING'S AWAKENING  
by Frank Wedekind

Edited and Translated by  
**Eric Bentley**

ERIC BENTLEY'S  
DRAMATIC REPERTOIRE  
VOLUME ONE

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 **APPLAUSE**   
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## **BEFORE BRECHT: FOUR GERMAN PLAYS**

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# Leonce and Lena

*A Comedy in Three Acts*

by GEORG BÜCHNER

*English version by Eric Bentley*

ALFIERI: E la Fama?

GOZZI: E la Fame?

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER LARKIN

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## CHARACTERS

KING PETER *of the Kingdom of Popo*  
PRINCE LEONCE, his son  
PRINCESS LENA *of the Kingdom of Peepee,*  
*betrothed to PRINCE LEONCE*  
VALERIO  
THE GOVERNESS  
THE PRIVATE TUTOR  
THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE  
THE COURT CHAPLAIN  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE DISTRICT BOARD  
THE SCHOOLMASTER  
ROSETTA  
SERVANTS, COUNCILLORS, PEASANTS, ETC.



Note on pronunciation of names: The present version being in English, there is no more reason to say Lena in the German way (*Layna*) than to say Peter in the German way (*Payter*). Full Anglicization is recommended: *Leena*, *Lee-unce*, *Valeerio*.

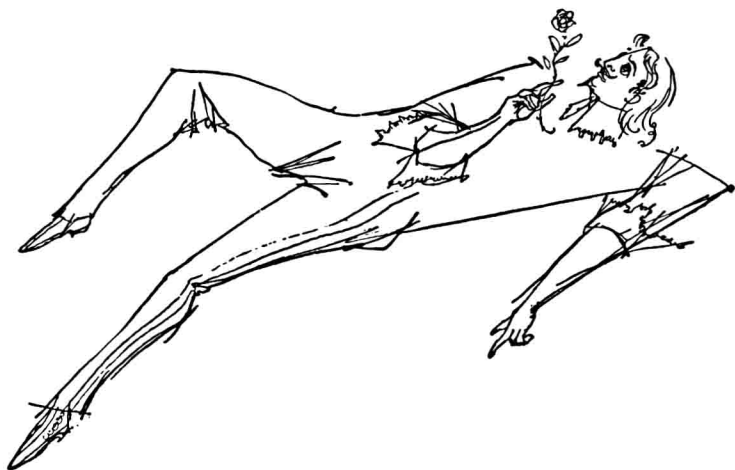
## ACT ONE

*O that I were a fool!  
I am ambitious for a molley coat!*  
—AS YOU LIKE IT

### SCENE 1

LEONCE, *half lying on a bench. His PRIVATE TUTOR.*

LEONCE. Well, what do you want from me, sir? You'd like to prepare me for my calling? I'm afraid I have my hands full already, I've more work than I know how to get through. First I have to spit on this stone three hundred and sixty-five times in a row. Did you ever try it? Go ahead. It is peculiarly entertaining. Then again, you see this handful of sand? *He picks up some sand, throws it in the air, catches it on the back of his hand.*



I throw it in the air. Shall we bet? How many grains on the back of my hand—odd or even number?—What? You don't want to bet? Are you a pagan? Do you believe in God? I usually just bet against myself, and I get along pretty well, but if you could find me someone else to bet against once in a while, you'd certainly be doing me a great favor. Then too, I have to figure out how I can contrive to see the top of my head. If a man could but see the top of his own head! That is one of my ideals, it would set my heart at rest. Then too—yes, then

infinitely more too. Am I an idler? Do I have nothing to do? Indeed, it is sad . . .

TUTOR. Very sad, your highness.

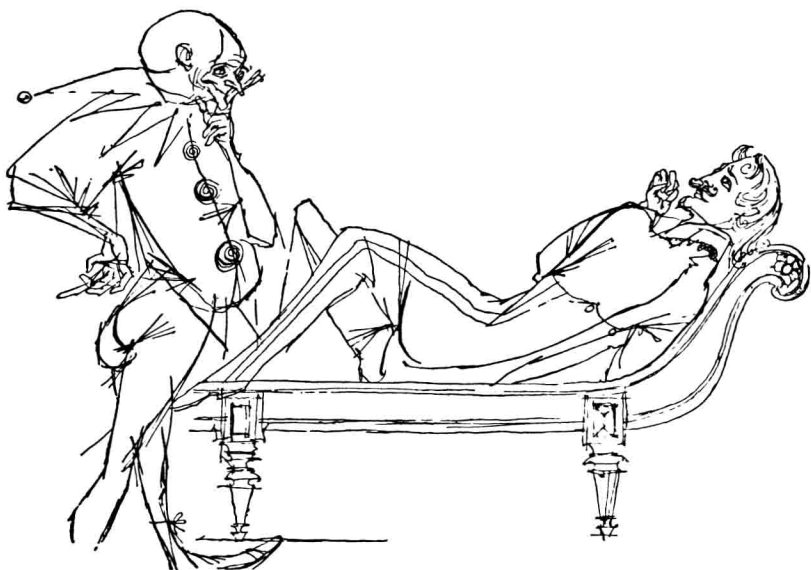
LEONCE. . . . it is very sad that the clouds have been moving from west to east for three weeks running. It makes me quite melancholy.

TUTOR. And well it might, your highness.

LEONCE. Why don't you contradict me, man? You have urgent business, haven't you? Sorry to have kept you so long.

*The TUTOR withdraws with a low bow.*

When you bow, dear sir, your legs form a beautiful parenthesis. My congratulations! *Alone, he stretches out on the bench.* The bees sit lazily



on the flowers, the sunshine lies idly on the ground, a terrible idleness rages!—Idleness is the starting-point of all the vices. What people won't do out of boredom! They study from boredom, they pray from boredom, they fall in love, marry, are fruitful and multiply from boredom, later on they die from boredom, and all this—which is the cream of the jest—without in the least knowing why, though they keep a straight face and think their own thoughts, and what thoughts! These heroes, these geniuses, these blockheads, these saints, these sinners, these heads of families are, one and all, nothing but sophisticated idlers.—Now why must *I* know this? Why me in particular? Why can't



I be important to myself and dress up this poor puppet of a body in a tail coat and put an umbrella in its hand to make sure it's very law-abiding and very useful and very moral. As a jester I'm a fiasco. Then again, why can't I look serious when I make my jokes? This fellow who just left—oh, I envy *him*, I could give him a beating, I envy him so much. If only one could be somebody else for once! Just for a minute!—

VALERIO, *a little drunk, enters.*

How that man runs! If only I knew of anything that could still make *me* run!

VALERIO, *coming right in front of the prince, puts one finger to his nose, and stares at him.* Yes!

LEONCE, *also staring.* Correct!

VALERIO. You take my meaning?

LEONCE. Perfectly.

VALERIO. Then let's change the subject. Meanwhile I shall lie on the greensward and let my nose blossom above the blades of grass and get romantic notions when bees and butterflies light on it—

As if a nose  
Were a rose!

LEONCE. Don't breathe so hard, my dear fellow, or the bees and butterflies will starve: the flowers are their snuffbox, and you're taking great pinches of the snuff.

VALERIO. Oh sir, how much feeling I have for Nature! The grass, for instance. It's so beautiful, I'd like to be an ox to eat it, and then become a man again to eat the ox that ate the grass.

LEONCE. Unhappy man! You, too, seem to labor under ideals!

VALERIO. [*\*Do I!* For eight days now I have run after the ideal of beef without in reality meeting with a single slice. *He sings.*

Our hostess has a merry maid  
That sits in her garden night and day  
That sits and sits in her garden  
Till twelve o'clock has chimed away  
And the infantry comes ma-arching.

*He sits down on the ground.* Look at these ants! Is it not marvelous, children dear, the instinct we find in such tiny creatures? Order! Diligence!

\* The passage in brackets, ending on page 7, is relegated to an appendix in the Insel edition, as belonging only to a draft.

—There are but three ways, dear sir, of earning money in a humane manner: finding it, winning it in a lottery, and inheriting it, though, of course, you could steal it if you were smart enough to be able to do so without compunction.



LEONCE. You have managed to grow fairly old on these principles without dying of hunger or on the gallows.

VALERIO, *still staring at him*. Oh yes, sir. And my contention is that whoever earns his living in any other way is a rogue.

LEONCE. For work is a subtle form of suicide, and a suicide is a criminal, and a criminal is a rogue. *Ergo*, whoever works is a rogue.

VALERIO. Correct.—And yet ants are a very useful sort of vermin, though not so useful as they would be if they did no harm at all. Nevertheless, worthy vermin, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of kicking some of you on the behind with my heel, wiping your noses, and cutting your nails.

*Enter two policemen.*

FIRST. Stop! Where is the fellow?

SECOND. There are two.

FIRST. Take a look if anyone's running away.

SECOND. I think no one is.

FIRST. Then we must question them both.—Gentlemen, we are looking for someone, a subject, an individual, a person, a delinquent, a suspect, a fellow. *To* SECOND. Take a look if anyone's started blushing.

SECOND. No one's started blushing.

FIRST. Then we must try something else.—Where is the warrant, the description, the certificate? SECOND *takes a paper out of his pocket and hands it over*. You check these subjects! I'll do the reading. "A man . . ."

SECOND. A man? There are two.

FIRST. Blockhead! "A man walks on two feet, has two arms and, to boot, one mouth, one nose, two eyes, two ears. Special characteristics: a highly dangerous individual."

SECOND. That applies to both. Shall I arrest them both?

FIRST. Two? That's dangerous. There are only two of *us*. I'm going to make a report. It's a case of very criminal complication or very complicated criminality. For if I get myself drunk and lie on my bed, that's no one else's business, it's my affair. But if I have to sell the bed to pay for the drinks, then it *is* someone else's business, but *whose*, you rascal?

SECOND. Well, I wouldn't know.

FIRST. I wouldn't know either, but that's the point.

*Exeunt both.*

VALERIO. And there are people who don't believe in Providence! Think what you can achieve with a single flea! For if this flea hadn't run across me last night, I wouldn't have carried my bed out in the sun this morning. And if I hadn't carried my bed out in the sun this morning, I'd never have got to the Moon Tavern. And if sun and moon hadn't shone on the bed, I could never have pressed the wine out of the mattress and got drunk on it. And if none of all this had happened, I wouldn't be in your company now, worthy ants, letting you pick my bones bare and leave my skeleton to dry in the sun. No, I'd be cutting myself a slice of meat and drying up a bottle of wine—in the hospital, naturally.

LEONCE. "The course of true love never did run smooth."

VALERIO. The wars were running pretty smooth, and the enemy would have run a bullet through me if I hadn't been so handy at running for cover. But anything to save a life. I ran till I had the galloping consumption, at any rate that's what the doctor thought. But of course I *had* to let consumption consume me if I for my part was to consume good soup, good beef, good bread, good wine, and save the life of a patriot and a soldier.] What a pity one can't jump from a church steeple without breaking one's neck! One can't even eat four pounds of cherries complete with the pits and not get belly-ache! Look, sir, I could sit in a corner and all night long to the end of my days sing:

Hey! Just look at that fly on the wall  
Fly on the wall  
Fly on the wall

—and so on.

LEONCE. Oh shut up with your song! It could make a fool of a man.

VALERIO. Then a man would be something. A fool! A fool! Who will trade me his folly for my reason?—Ha! I'm Alexander the Great! The sun seems a golden crown on my hair, and just look how my uniform glitters! Generalissimo Grasshopper, let the troops advance! Finance Minister Spider, I need money! Lady-in-Waiting Dragonfly, what is my dear wife Beanstalk a-doing of? My good Court Physician Cantharides, I'm in need of an heir to the throne! And on top of these rare fantasies, one gets good soup, good meat, good bread, a good bed and one's hair cut for nothing—in the madhouse, naturally—while with my reason intact I could at best sell my services to a cherry tree for the promotion of ripeness in order to—well?—in order to?

LEONCE. To make the cherry trees turn red with shame at the holes in your trousers. But, noblest one, your craft, your profession, your trade, your rank, your art?

VALERIO, *with dignity*. Sir, what keeps me so busy is idling. I am very good at doing absolutely nothing. I have an infinite capacity for laziness. My hands were never desecrated by a callus, nor has my brow ever given the earth a drop to drink. In work, I am a virgin. And I would take the trouble to explain these merits of mine to you in greater detail, if indeed the trouble were not too much trouble.

LEONCE, *with comic enthusiasm*. Let me clasp you to my bosom! Are you one of those godlike beings who walk the great highway of this life untroubled, with a clear brow, and who, like the blessed gods themselves, enter Olympus with gleaming feet and blooming bodies? Come! Come!

VALERIO, *singing as he leaves*.

Hey! Just look at that fly on the wall  
Fly on the wall  
Fly on the wall

*Exeunt both, arm in arm.*

## SCENE 2

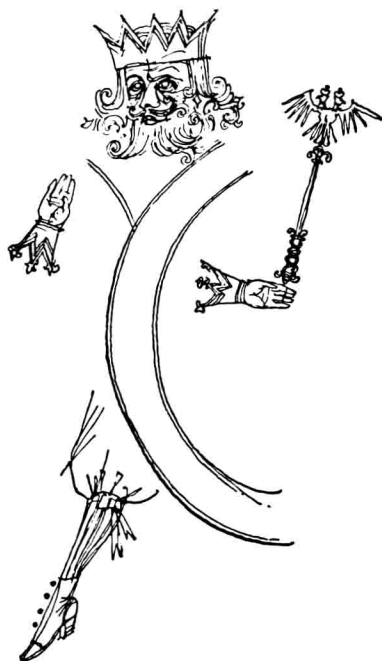
*A room. KING PETER is being dressed by two valets.*

KING PETER, *as the dressing proceeds*. Man must think, and I must think for my subjects; for they don't think, they don't think.—Substance is the thing-in-itself, that's me. *He runs about the room nearly naked*. Is that understood? "In-itself" means "in-itself," do you understand? Then

come my attributes, qualifications, affections, and accidental properties. Where is my shirt, where are my trousers? Stop! Pah! Free will's flies are undone! Where is morality? Where are my French cuffs? The categories have been shamelessly confused. Two buttons too many have been buttoned. The snuffbox is in my right-hand pocket. My whole system is ruined!—Ha! What does the button in this handkerchief mean? Fellow, what does the button mean, what did I want to remind myself of?

FIRST VALET. When your majesty deigned to tie this button in your handkerchief you wanted——

KING PETER. Well?



FIRST VALET. To remind yourself of something.

KING PETER. A complicated answer!—Indeed! Well, and what do *you* think?

SECOND VALET. Your majesty wanted to remind yourself of something when you deigned to tie this button in your handkerchief.

KING PETER *runs up and down*. What? What? Human beings get me all mixed up. I am in the utmost confusion. I am at my wit's end.

*Enter a servant.*

SERVANT. The Council of State is met, your majesty.

KING PETER, *joyfully*. That's it, that's it, of course: I wanted to remind myself of my people!—Come, gentlemen. Walk symmetrically! Isn't it very hot? Then take your handkerchiefs and wipe your faces! I'm always so embarrassed when I'm to speak in public!

*Exeunt omnes.*

*Re-enter KING PETER, this time with the Council of State.*

KING PETER. Beloved friends, faithful retainers, I wanted to announce and make known—announce and make known—for my son either gets married or he doesn't—with one finger to his nose—either, or—you do understand me? There's no third way out. Man must think. *Stands musing for a while.* When I speak my thoughts aloud this way, I don't



know who's speaking, myself or someone else. And this frightens me. *After prolonged musing.* I am I.—What do you think of that, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT, *with slow gravity*. Perhaps it is so, your majesty. But perhaps it is also not so.

WHOLE COUNCIL OF STATE IN CHORUS. Yes! Perhaps it is so! But perhaps it is also not so!

KING PETER, *moved*. My wise men!—Well then, what were we talking about? What was I trying to make a speech about? President, why do you have so short a memory on so solemn an occasion? The meeting is adjourned.

*He solemnly withdraws, the whole Council of State following him.*

SCENE 3

*A richly decorated hall. Candles are burning. LEONCE with several servants.*

LEONCE. Are all the shutters closed? Light the candles! Away with the day, I want night, deep, ambrosial night! Put the lamps under crystal shades among the oleanders so that they peep dreamily out from under the leaves like eyes from under girlish lashes! Bring the roses closer that the wine may sparkle on their petals like dew-drops! Music! Where are the violins? Where is Rosetta?—Away! All of you, away!

*Exeunt servants. LEONCE stretches out on a couch. Prettily dressed, ROSETTA enters. Music from the distance.*

ROSETTA, *approaching with flattering mien*. Leonce!

LEONCE. Rosetta!

ROSETTA. Leonce!

LEONCE. Rosetta!

ROSETTA. Your lips are lazy. From kissing?

LEONCE. From yawning.

ROSETTA. Oh!

LEONCE. Oh, Rosetta, I am faced with the terrible task . . .

ROSETTA. Yes, what?

LEONCE. Of doing nothing . . .

ROSETTA. But loving?

LEONCE. A task indeed!

ROSETTA, *offended*. Leonce!

LEONCE. Or an occupation.

ROSETTA. Or pure idleness.

LEONCE. You are right as always. You're a clever girl. I set great store by your perspicacity.

ROSETTA. You love me then out of sheer boredom?

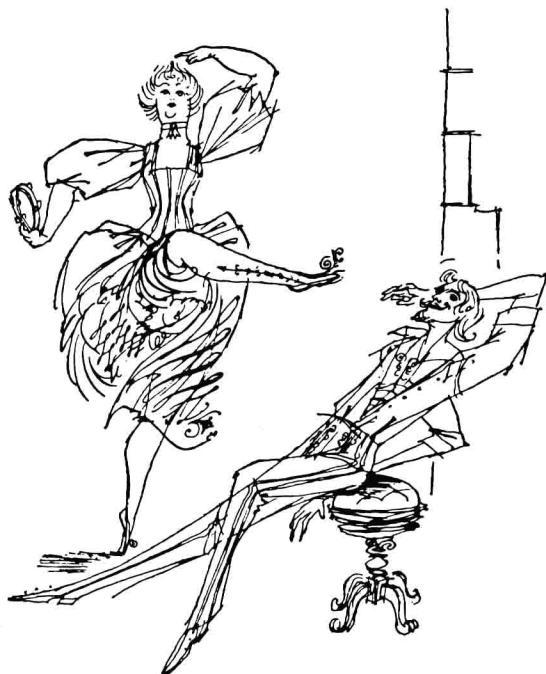
LEONCE. No. I feel boredom because I love you. But I love my boredom as I love you—the two of you are one. *O dolce far niente!* Your eyes are

deep and hidden magic springs, I sit dreaming over them. Your caressing lips lull me to sleep like the rushing of waves. *He embraces her.* Come, dearest boredom, your kisses are a voluptuous yawning, and your steps a pretty hiatus.

ROSETTA. You love me, Leonce?

LEONCE. Why not, indeed?

ROSETTA. Forever?



LEONCE. That is a long word: forever. If I love you five thousand years and seven months, will that do? It's a lot less than forever, but at that it's quite a time: we could take our time at loving each other.

ROSETTA. Or time could take our love from us.

LEONCE. Or love our time from us. Dance, Rosetta, dance!

That time may move with the beat  
Of your small attractive feet.

ROSETTA. My feet would rather be out of time. *She dances and sings.*



Tired feet of mine, must you dance  
So gaily shod  
When you would rather quiet lie  
Beneath the sod?

Hot cheeks of mine, must you glow  
In the night  
When you would rather be  
Two roses white?

Poor eyes of mine, must you flash  
In torch-lit park  
When you would rather sleep away your pain  
In the dark?

LEONCE, *dreaming away to himself, meanwhile*. Oh, a dying love is more beautiful than a budding one! I am a Roman: at a fine banquet, during the dessert, golden fishes are sporting in colors of death. See the color die in her cheeks, the light in her eyes go out! How gentle the undulation of her limbs, their rising and falling! *Addio, addio*, my love, I will love your dead body. ROSETTA *approaches him again*. Tears, Rosetta? A delicate Epicureanism—to be able to cry! Stand in the sun so the fine drops will crystallize—they'll make splendid diamonds—you can have yourself a necklace made of them.

ROSETTA. Diamonds, yes. They cut into my eyes. Oh, Leonce! *She tries to embrace him*.

LEONCE. Look out! My head! I have buried my love in it. Look in through the windows of my eyes. You see how dead the poor thing is? You see the two white roses on its cheeks, the two red ones on its breast? Don't push me or it will break an arm, and that would be a shame. I have to carry my head very straight on my shoulders, the way the undertaker woman\* carries a child's coffin.

ROSETTA, *playfully*. Fool!

LEONCE. Rosetta! ROSETTA *makes a face at him*. Thank God! *He keeps his eyes shut*.

ROSETTA, *scared*. Leonce, look at me!

LEONCE. Not for anything.

ROSETTA. Just one look!

\* Strictly, the layer-out, but this term is no longer familiar.